

**NEWS RELEASE | FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | Oct. 24, 2020**

## **Burgum signs executive order to ensure election integrity, timely results for absentee ballots**

BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Doug Burgum today signed an [executive order](#) granting a request from county auditors to allow processing of absentee ballots to begin on Oct. 29, ensuring that election workers have adequate time to verify voter information and ensure election integrity and timely results on Election Day.

North Dakota counties preparing for the Nov. 3 general election are reporting record numbers of applications for absentee and mail ballots as well as record numbers of voters returning completed absentee and mail ballots.

To date, the Secretary of State reports more than 205,000 absentee and mail ballots for the 2020 general election have been sent out to eligible voters – a 100% increase over the 2018 general election and a 130% increase over the 2016 general election. North Dakota citizens cast a record 159,397 ballots by mail during the June primary election, which was conducted across the state with efficiency and integrity.

Existing state law only allows local election boards to process absentee and mail ballots beginning the day before and the day of Election Day. To avoid a significant delay in reporting election results after the polls close on Election Day, the North Dakota County Auditors Association requested additional time for local election boards to conduct the initial verification and securing of absentee and mail ballots.

[Executive Order 2020-13.1](#) gives absentee ballot counting boards more time to complete their duties as prescribed by law but does not alter the process that must be

completed. Local election boards may **not** count votes or generate vote totals or election results until after the polls have closed on Election Day.

"This executive order will ensure counties are able to guarantee the highest level of election integrity while ensuring the timeliness of election results, critical to the democratic process," Burgum said.

North Dakota counties have traditionally relied upon civic-minded retired citizens to serve as election board workers, but that pool of potential election board workers has decreased in size as a result of concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"As the state's chief election official, I commend the county auditors and the state's election team on how they have met every challenge encountered in 2020," Secretary of State Al Jaeger said. "With the historically high use of mail and absentee ballots, voters can be assured that the additional processing time will be beneficial in providing accurate and timely election results. It is another example of why North Dakota has been ranked # 1 in the country for election administration in five out of the past six election cycles."

Donnell Preskey Hushka, executive director for the North Dakota County Auditors Association, said the additional processing time will allow counties to verify signatures and prepare ballots for processing through the election equipment.

"In June, we saw how this additional time helped counties tabulate results in a timely manner after the polls closed. Without this extension, and with the increased volume of absentee and mail ballots counties are expecting, results could be delayed not by hours but maybe even days," Preskey Hushka said. "Today's action by the governor will ensure election integrity and timely election results while also ensuring that poll workers have a safe and productive environment to complete their meticulous work during this time of increased precautions and absentee voting."